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In Hawaii today, many persons find it a disadvantage to speak only the social dialect of their home speech communities. For those young adults who enter a University, the problem may be especially acute. The Speech Communication Center of the University of Hawaii is developing a measure of speech-communication proficiency that predicts the reaction of trained judges. Most importantly, it is engaged in a training program designed to enable those young adults who wish to modify social dialects to be able to do so at a reasonable cost. This paper constitutes a progress report: it describes the tutorial program presently used. (DO)

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SOCIAL DIALECT AND SPEECH COMMUNICATION PROFICIENCY

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

My intent is to make this account as simple and as operational as possible. For this reason, I choose the minimum unit of two-persons as my reference. Please notice that my point of observation differs from that of the usual linguist-informant relationship. My statements are those of an observer of two persons who are engaged in face-to-face communication.

Any two persons engaged in purposeful face-to-face communication constitute a communication system. Viewing such a two-person system, the observer may attend to any or all behaviors that meet his criteria for communication. Again to simplify this account, I report only observations relevant to the audio-lingual or speech band. Hence, the framework may then be called a two-person speech communication system.

Within this communication system, I will consider three variables of importance. The first relates to differences in cultural backgrounds of two persons. These differences may be called social dialects, or more exactly, cultural-social dialects. The second variable derives from the content of communication. As content becomes more technical, sentences tend to become longer, vocabulary items become less predictable, etc. A third variable emerges from the nature of the desired outcome or result of communication. When any two persons must complete a task or arrive at a working agreement, they must be able to sustain communication for a suitable length of time. A high level of communication skill or proficiency is required. Hence, within this two-person system, an observer identifies variables of social dialects, content complexity, and desired outcomes.

Typically, persons with markedly different social dialects do not know each other; they are strangers. Frequently, one person has substantially greater knowledge on the subject than the other; the content is technical. The person with the lesser knowledge must make use of newly acquired technical information; the outcome requires action. A young adult, then, in school and on the job, spends much of his time communicating with strangers on technical subjects for the purpose of achieving an outcome. He must be proficient in situations of this type.

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2.0 SOCIAL DIALECTS: THE PROBLEM AREA

Peoples from both East and West immigrated at different times to Hawaii. There are sizeable groups that can be identified in terms of country of origin, language background, educational background, preferred type of employment, and so on. Social mobility and intermarriage confound the analysis problem. Recently, the state census taker stopped trying to classify persons on the basis of race. It had become a meaningless and impossible distinction. To put it another way, in Hawaii there is no majority group: there are only minority groups. Social mobility requires that any person must be able to communicate with persons from social groups distant from the primary speech-community of his parents. Attitudes toward the several social dialects of Hawaiian English vary from person to person, and from time to time in the life span of each person.

Previous research on social dialect shows that two persons from different social groups encounter greater difficulty understanding each other than they do in understanding persons from their own social group. Such a finding might be deduced equally from a contrastive analysis of phonological systems of any two persons. A socially mobile person, then, encounters difficulty in understanding and being understood at that time when he attempts to move about socially. Hence, mobility requires language expansion. No one social dialect appears adequate for all of the social, educational, and employment situations that any person encounters in the course of a single day.

The concept of dialect presupposes a certain stability in speech behavior, a set of habits. Yet, analysis is complicated by the fact that a twenty-year old in Hawaii talks one way to his childhood friends, and another way to the linguist-stranger. In the speech to his friend, the mobile young adult may maintain an "authentic" Hawaiian "pidgin." With the stranger, he may oscillate between "pidgin" and educated English. Such oscillation complicates the task of analysis. It serves, however, as a <u>starting point</u> for a substantially modified training approach.

3.0 SPEECH COMMUNICATION PROFICIENCY: THE TARGET

Attempts to describe standard or educated English have not been notably successful. We have had to seek an operational alternative. In America it is obvious to any listener that Standard Southern English differs from Standard Mid-west or Standard Hawaiian English. Out of necessity, in our Center, we have come to focus on the alternative of proficiency, on Speech-Communication Proficiency.

All students enrolling in the University of Hawaii are heard by trained judges at time of entrance. The judges are instructed by the University to hear each student and render a decision on the basis of his demonstrated proficiency in speaking English. A student may be judged in need of further training. Judges work in panels of three. They hear a student give a prepared one or two minute speech; they also cross-examine him. Over the past two-years, we have been studying the judges.

Our research to date shows high agreement among panels of three judges on the matter of the speech-communication proficiency of a student. Equally, our panels of trained judges agree well with panels of judges of faculty members from other University departments, with high school teachers, civic leaders, and importantly, employment interviewers. Clearly, the panel of three judges constitutes a reliable estimate of speech communication proficiency.

When one must estimate the proficiency of one-thousand students a day, the pool of trained judges can no longer cope with the task. Besides, it is expensive to employ highly trained faculty members on this type of task. In our situation, it is useful for us to develop a screening test that will class students into two groups: the first, proficient; the second, not yet proficient, and in need of formal training.

We were aware at the outset of the test development project that we would try many tests that would turn out to be useless for our purposes. The original battery of tests comprised some fifty promising sub-tests. It took a student nearly three hours to complete the battery. Each student who took the test had been heard by a panel of judges. We analyzed the scores of the student on the test battery in terms of the ratings by the judges of the student's speech. This analysis eliminated all but seven of the original fifty tests in the battery. The tests that survived had the one characteristic in common that they consisted mainly of speech tape-recorded at conversational speed. These seven tests were revised and expanded to a new battery one-hour length. Analysis of these data eliminated all but a few items on three of the tests in this battery.

The items remaining compose a test of approximately five minutes length. This test will be readministered in a few days to some two-thousand persons who will also be heard by judges. If the test reliably predicts the judges' decisions, we will then be able to measure speech-communication proficiency at a considerably lower cost.

The trained judges are reliable. This fact is well established and repeatedly demonstrated. This gives the researcher considerable confidence in the judge. Because we are charged with training, in modifying social dialect, we began asking judges to indicate what needed to be changed in the speech of the students. We find that three trained judges may agree perfectly in their ratings of a given student, and yet, each may recommend a distinctly different training program for that student. Such a finding is of considerable <u>indirect</u> help in planning a training program.

4.0 THE ROLE OF THE TUTOR: FROM PROBLEM TO TARGET

The formal classes previously offered at the University of Hawaii for those students judged to need training were moderately successful. Some thirty hours per semester were required in class and approximately that amount of work was required out of class. The instructors were well trained, the courses were well-organized. Even so, some 25% of the students in any semester did not achieve proficiency. The formal classroom approach was tried fairly, then, and found less than adequate.

The Speech Communication Center was organized, in part, to facilitate the development of materials and approaches to cope with the social dialect "problem." Instruction was to be individualized. Teaching machines and learning programs were to be used. Such was our plan. Construction of the Center was delayed several months. Out of necessity, in the interim, the staff began tutoring individual students in their offices.

They began--as teachers are likely to do--by explaining in lecture style. Students listened politely and changed little. It was a class for one. Being human, "teacher-tutors" progressively grew tired of repeating explanations and required the student to talk more. The students began to change.

By trial and error, tutors gradually evolved from having the student read speech drill materials, to having him read one of his textbooks, to having him talk from his lecture notes in his area of major study. As a student talked from his lecture notes, he was required to formulate complete sentences as he went along.

The observer examining the records of such a two-person tutorial, noted that the tutor was making only a very limited number of different responses. Tutor responses were then coded. Currently, the student talks 85% of the tutorial time, the tutor 15% of the time.

The tutor began building on the observation mentioned earlier that a student talks one way with his friends and oscillates in language level when he speaks with a stranger. They reasoned that explanations were of little use to a person who could already do the thing explained. So the tutor began making more frequent use of the negative reinforcer "unh-unh." The tutor would say "unh-unh" for any deficient sentence. Such an exchange normally has one or two cycles in informal conversation and in the tutorial. Occasionally, the tutor re-cycles the process as often as 8 or 10 times. It is at this point that the tutor behaves in a way no "polite" listener in any culture ever behaves. The re-cycling generates tension that produces change.

On examination of the records kept by the tutors, it became apparent that some orders of attention to problems were much more efficient than others. After trying several combinations, the tutor is now instructed to attend to: 1. loudness, 2. voice quality, 3. pitch-intonation, 4. rate, 5. articulation, and 6. diction, in that order. (No trained judge suggested a training program anything like this one.)

By now it is probably apparent to you that the role of the tutor in the two-person system resembles the activities of an interested listener. There few differences. The role of tutor is a simple one.

There comes a time in a tutorial where the student modifies what he has just said before the tutor has time to react. This is a turning point. Before this point, the tutor might react negatively to every sentence or two the student utters. After self-correction begins, the student rather quickly begins to generate error free 8 and 10 sentence chains.

The tutorial operation described here is remarkably simple. For this reason, we began employing students as tutors after they reach the point of correcting themselves. We expect tutoring a fellow student will maintain and stabilize social dialect change. We are now in the process of developing self-instructional materials to enable one student to learn to tutor another.

In April and May of this year, for instance, we trained some 200 students with an average time of under 200 minutes. This compares favorably with the 30 class hours in the formal courses. To date, we have had no permanent failures. We have had a few temporary failures, however. Success in this context means being heard by the previously mentioned panel of judges and being "passed."

The approach through the tutorial is as simple as I have described here today. We expect to refine and further develop it in the years ahead.

5.0 SUMMARY

In Hawaii today, many persons find it a disadvantage to speak only the social dialect of their home speech communities. For those young adults who enter a University, the problem may be especially acute.

We are developing a measure of speech-communication proficiency that predicts the reaction of trained judges. Most importantly, we are engaged in a training program designed to enable those young adults who wish to modify social dialects to be able to do so at a reasonable cost.

This paper constitutes a progress report. Our practice is ahead of our theory by an uncomfortable margin. Our technical report writing has been neglected, but we shall have time to remedy that situation in the coming year. The approach described here combines operations of both research and instruction. If you are interested in any aspect of our work, we would welcome the opportunity of sharing our findings with you.